



## Peace Corp experience leads to veterinary profession for Shelby Molina

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *This story is one in a series featuring DATCP employees and their programs.*

MADISON – She knew from age ten that she wanted to be a veterinarian, but it took two and a half years in Honduras with the Peace Corp for Shelby Molina to determine the true direction her career would take. Molina works as a district veterinarian for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, covering a nine-county area in southeast Wisconsin, a position she has held for more than 18 years.

"It's hard to believe that 18 years have gone by, but I enjoy what I do. I like field work. I like working with the farmers and being outside. I can't imagine working in the office behind a desk."

Molina spends a significant amount of time traveling to farms and doing field work, which keeps her personally connected with the farming community and youth organizations. Molina might be called to a farm as a result of a positive disease test, which requires an intensive investigation that involves finding the cause of the disease, planning disease eradication measures, looking into the history of the farm, the life of that animal including where it came from and where it was going, and whether there are signs of disease elsewhere on the farm. Sometimes it might involve taking tests from additional animals.

"Our job continues even after we leave the farm, though. We have to follow up on the test results and check in with the farm to ensure that their biosecurity measures are in place," Molina said.

A native of Milwaukee, Molina wasn't raised on a farm, but she developed an interest in cattle at her grandparent's farm when she was very young. She learned about being a veterinarian by job shadowing with small animal and large animal veterinarians throughout high school and found she enjoyed livestock work most. When it came time to apply to colleges, she knew exactly which schools she needed to attend in order to achieve her goal of becoming a veterinarian. She landed at Michigan State University where she completed both her undergraduate and graduate studies.

After graduating from veterinary school, Molina headed to Honduras as a member of the Peace Corps.

"Peace Corps veterinary work in a developing nation seemed like an ideal way to combine my career choice with service to those who needed it most," she said. "People in the developing world rely heavily on their livestock for their health and livelihood."

This experience piqued her interest in foreign animal disease and the impact that animal health has on human health. It planted the seed in her mind that the relationship between these two fields might be an interesting career path to pursue. But she didn't really know that this type of work existed.

"I didn't even know this was a job. When I was in school, everything we were told was practice-oriented because you'd likely go out and work in a clinic. There have always been veterinarians in public health, but they never talked about it in school," Molina said.



*Shelby Molina brings Honduran Peace Corps experience to her 18 year career as a district veterinarian.*

What most people don't understand, though, according to Molina, is that what she and the other four field veterinarians do daily is very important to the Wisconsin way of life.

"What they don't know is that we are protecting the agriculture industry in the state of Wisconsin," she says. "One reason agriculture livestock businesses thrive here is the state's disease-free status, which draws businesses to the state and leads to greater revenue and jobs. Also, there's a big public health aspect of it as well. We support the consumer protection and food safety programs by performing the on-farm aspect of food borne illness investigations."

But Molina's favorite part of the job is education. While she does spend a significant amount of time educating veterinarians and producers, it's the kids that she enjoys most.

"I visit 4H groups and livestock groups quite a bit and it's fun to interact with the kids. This spring I talked about poultry biosecurity to the 4H groups to help them understand how to keep their flocks healthy by carefully selecting their birds and following sanitation guidelines," she said.

As for the future, Molina foresees many opportunities to continue learning. She anticipates a greater emphasis on veterinarians becoming involved in continuing education on regulatory matters.

Molina's time in Honduras proved to her that she wanted to "help make a difference in the world." She says now after 18 years with DATCP, "I am still hoping my work makes a difference in the world, although in a different setting."

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